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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Most holy and gracious God, who turns the shadow of night into morning, satisfy us with Your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad this day. Lift the light of Your countenance upon our lawmakers. Calm every troubled thought and guide their feet into the way of peace. Lord, perfect Your strength in their weakness and help them to serve You in the spirit that honors Your Name. Guide their debates to expose truth, to produce creative compromise, and to bring solutions that will keep America strong. May they use their talents to restore and renew our Nation and world. We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JIM WEBB led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 2, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator

from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WEBB thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following the remarks of the two leaders, the Senate will consider the Omnibus appropriations bill. The bill will be open for debate and amendments. There will be no rollcall votes today as we announced previously. Senators should expect the next vote to occur prior to the caucus luncheons tomorrow. There will be a joint meeting of Congress on Wednesday at 11 a.m. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown will address Members of Congress in the Hall of the House of Representatives. Senators are encouraged to gather in the Senate Chamber at 10:30, those who wish to, to proceed to the House as a body so we can get there in time for the 11 o'clock session.

GOOD FAITH

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as a majority, we have done a good job of showing that the Senate can act in a reasonable manner. We have had amendments. We have shown good faith by allowing amendments on basically everything. This bill that is now before us is a big bill. I know there will be speeches given about how big it is. But keep in mind what is in the bill. Last year, we couldn't work anything out with the President, so we funded everything except Defense, Homeland Security, and military construction with a con-

tinuing resolution that took us until March 6. March 6 is upon us. The reason I am talking about the bill being the size it is, remember, it includes appropriations for the year dealing with Agriculture—extremely important—Commerce, Energy, Treasury, Interior, Labor, legislative branch—I was chairman of that subcommittee for a long time, and very important items are included in that—State Department. Of course, there are lots of other things that go into those. I have just mentioned the main name on the bill that is in the omnibus.

This process has been as open as anything could be. The full committee was open. Each one of the subcommittees had full input by all ranking members. It is time we move on to get into a regular process where we have not 9 bills but 12 bills that we bring before the Senate. That is what I intend to do.

As we have shown good faith, I think the Republicans have shown good faith. Although there are some amendments I wish they had not offered, that is how things work out here. On this bill, we have to make sure that reciprocity is also the same. We have shown good faith. I have had a lot of people come to me and say: Look, this bill is so important. Let's not have any amendments. Let's go ahead and get 60 votes and get it out of here. I think that is not the right thing to do. As I have announced, there will be amendments. As much as we can, we are not going to have a bunch of amendments pending because we are working on a very short timeframe, and we will work as closely as we can with the minority. We have two terrific managers of this bill, Senators INOUE and COCHRAN.

I was told Senator MCCAIN was going to be here to offer an amendment. I was told he was going to offer an amendment and that we would have a CR and not the omnibus. That is a reasonable amendment to offer. I think that is appropriate. We will need a little time to talk about that. But I think

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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that is appropriate. I believe in reciprocity and good faith. I had a conversation the other day with the Republican leader. He didn't mention who was going to offer the amendment, but both of us thought there would be such an amendment offered.

I look forward to completing this legislation. We need to do it by Thursday. I hope we can work our way through this. If it is the CR amendment—and I have no other information other than staff told me walking in that that was going to be the case—I think that is an amendment that will take a little bit of time for us to discuss. There is not much to look at. It is probably one line long. I think I have made myself clear. This is an important piece of legislation for our country. It is an important piece of legislation for the Senate so we can get back to our regular appropriations process. We have done a good job of cutting, significantly, Government-directed spending. I have been on the record some time ago saying we have a constitutional obligation to make sure we are involved in how the country spends its money. We shouldn't leave how it is spent to bureaucrats in big offices here in Washington, made up of people who I don't think know my State as well as I do.

We should have a good, stout debate on a number of issues in the next few days and hopefully move on to other matters next week.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

AMENDMENT PROCESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the remarks of my friend the majority leader about the amendment process. I certainly commend him for the way in which we have operated this year. As he well knows, 41 Republicans signed a letter to him a couple months ago indicating this is an issue about which Republican Members, regardless of their particular political philosophy—and we do have lots of different philosophies represented in those 41 Members—felt very strongly about. I commend the majority leader for responding. I think it has given the Senate an opportunity to operate again such as it did in the past. I think Members are, by and large, on both sides of the aisle, comfortable with voting. People send us here to vote. My 41 Republicans represent half the American population, and they are certainly entitled to have their say. I think we are operating in a way that is widely accepted and popular on both sides of the aisle.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. With regard to the bill before us, the Omnibus appropri-

tions bill that arrived from the House certainly is an important piece of legislation, but it is not an emergency. Congress approves it every year. There is no need to rush something Congress approves every year. In fact, in January I recommended several times to the President and to the Democratic leaders in Congress that we move the omnibus before the stimulus. By determining what we would fund in an omnibus first, Democratic leaders would have been encouraged to be more timely, temporary, and targeted as they put together the stimulus. Instead, we have had the order reversed. The result is that now we have significant double spending showing up in both the stimulus and in the omnibus. We have known about the Friday deadline for months, so no one should suddenly point to it now as a reason to rush \$410 billion in spending.

Americans are getting whiplash from all the spending we are doing around here. Let me say that again. Americans are getting whiplash from all the spending we are doing around here. We need to slow down and consider the consequences of every dollar we spend. What we know about this bill already is cause for serious concern. As I said, it adds money for 122 programs. It adds money for 122 programs that were already in the stimulus. It represents an 8-percent increase over last year's bill.

Much of the funding it adds or eliminates calls for scrutiny. The new administration has repeatedly criticized Congress for rushing through legislation before the public has a chance to review it. During his campaign, the President said he wouldn't sign any nonemergency spending bill the American people had not had at least 5 days to review on the White House Web site. There is no reason for us to rush this massive bill when the White House has already promised it would not sign it without the requisite 5-day review. I would suggest, as we begin this debate, that the House prepare a short-term continuing resolution. There is no reason for either the Senate or the American people to feel artificially rushed, particularly on a bill of this magnitude.

It may seem quaint to some people, but a month ago many of us were concerned about a \$1.2 trillion deficit. Then we watched it grow, as we passed a \$1 trillion stimulus bill and a \$33 billion bill for SCHIP. Then last week the President proposed a \$3.6 trillion budget, including a \$634 billion "downpayment" on health care reform and a major tax increase on small businesses. We expect to be asked to spend \$1 to \$2 trillion to stabilize the financial sector, and we have been told the administration's housing plan, which is set to start this week, will cost a quarter of a trillion dollars.

We need to step back, look at the bigger picture, and think about what we are doing. That means slowing down before we spend another \$410 billion.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I have indicated, the omnibus bill has been fully vetted by the various committees, Democrats and Republicans alike. As to the issue the Republican leader raised, that people need more time to review this, this has been on the Web site for well more than a week. People could look at it and have it memorized by now. We also know the issues the Republican leader raised, that President Obama is talking about health care. Does anyone think that we can not do anything dealing with health care? People have said: How much is it going to cost to try to take care of health care?

How much is it going to cost to do nothing about health care? Fifty million people have no health insurance and millions of others are uninsured. If they have a private physician, every time they get sick and hurt, they go right to the emergency room. The highest priced medical care rendered anyplace in the Nation is in these emergency rooms. It drives up taxes, the cost of a doctor, the cost of hospitalization and, of course, insurance premiums. So we have to do something with health care.

Energy? We are importing 70 percent of our oil. We have to do something about energy. Education? We are failing American children by not doing more for education. So these issues we are going to take up in the future should have nothing to do with getting this most important legislation passed.

We are looking forward to moving this matter as quickly as possible. It is something that is important for the country because we have a lot of issues we need to get to after we fund the Government—something we should have done last year but we could not because of the difficulty we had working with President Bush.

I think what Senator INOUE and Senator COCHRAN have done is in keeping with the traditions of this body in meeting the needs of the American people. There is no wasteful spending in this most important piece of legislation. It is important to all 50 States. I am hopeful and confident we will pass this in the next few days.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2009

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1105, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as following:

A bill (H.R. 1105) making omnibus appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes.